

SEPSIS

What is sepsis?

Sepsis is a severe illness caused by overwhelming infection of the bloodstream by toxin (poison) producing bacteria. Sepsis accounts for 2 out of every 100 hospital admissions. It is life threatening and if it continues unchecked, will result in death. The death rate can be as high as 60% for people with underlying medical problems. It is less, but still significant, for individuals without other medical issues.

In 2001, sepsis was the fourth leading cause of death for people served by DMR. It was the ninth leading cause of death for the general population in Massachusetts. Why is the number so high for the people you support? It is probably due to an individual's inability to be aware of their own symptoms of illness and/or describe and report them to you. **Waiting for obvious symptoms to develop can often be too late to stop the progression of the infection.**

What causes sepsis?

Sepsis can be caused by an untreated bacterial infection or one that is not responding to treatment. Common places where those infections may occur are:

- kidneys
- liver or gall bladder
- bowel
- skin
- bladder
- lungs

What are the symptoms of sepsis?

Early signs:

- reduced mental alertness or feeling very tired
- hyperventilation (greater than 30 breaths per minute)
- fever (as little as 2 degrees higher than normal)

Advanced signs:

- very high fever (greater than 102) or low temperature (hypothermia)
- chills
- shaking
- warm skin
- rapid heart rate (greater than 90 beats per minute)
- decreased urine output
- skin rash
- confusion or delirium
- nausea and vomiting
- diarrhea
- low blood pressure
- low or high white blood cell count
- organ or system failure

